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Carol X Weakley 09/11/2006 03:10:58 PM From DB/Inbox: Carol X Weakley

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ACTION: ECON
INFO: IMO CONS RES IPSC SCI AID POL DCM FCS PD AMB
ADM

DISSEMINATION: ECON
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB:RJONES
DRAFTED: ECON:RRUFFER
CLEARED: DCM:GCRETZ, ECON:WWEINSTEIN, S/A:NOLSEN, USSC:MDUGGER

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INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 003590

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/08/2016
TAGS: [KWBG](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: MOFAZ DISCUSSES KARNI CROSSING WITH THE AMBASSADOR

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz told the Ambassador on September 6 that security is the main problem concerning Karni crossing, citing the 400-meter long tunnel discovered near there last week. Mofaz said that it would be important to see how the Palestinians will perform the security functions on their side of the crossing, and that he would meet with USSC Lt. Gen. Dayton to discuss the USSC's security plan for Karni. The Israeli Ministry of Defense (MOD) is responsible for deciding when the crossing is open based on intelligence of security threats, and the Ministry of Transportation (MOT) only carries out the orders, he emphasized. The Ambassador stressed the importance for Karni to be open regularly to support the Palestinian economy in the Gaza Strip. Yoram Shapira, deputy director general of border terminals and domestic airports at the Israel Airports Authority (IAA), discussed a proposal that the GOI is preparing for security at Karni, and explained that one of the most important factors of the plan would be operating a joint traffic/information management system for the crossing with the Palestinians. He also recommended that two additional scanners for palettes to be placed on the Palestinian side of Karni so that goods are scanned before they cross into Israel. He responded to the Ambassador's question that the GOI is getting ready to pick a software-based management system, and suggested that the Palestinians work with Israel on this, but he acknowledged that the GOI still has to decide whether the MOD or MOT will take the lead. End summary.

Priorities for MOT

12. (C) Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz told the Ambassador on September 6 that he was warming to his first opportunity to take responsibility for civilian issues. He said that his two top priorities in the Ministry of

Transportation (MOT) are to expand the road networks to close the gaps between central Israel and the periphery, and to improve road and railway safety. He said that improving road safety is an important and complicated goal. He added that there has never been a national program in Israel to reduce the number of casualties that Israel experiences due to car accidents each year. Mofaz remarked that Israel "can do better" with more funds and with better regulations for roads to help prevent some of the 450-550 deaths that take place on an annual basis. The Ambassador noted that roads in Israel are very well-designed, and Mofaz responded that this is true in central Israel, but not in the north and the south.

Karni Crossing

¶3. (C) Regarding Karni, the Ambassador commented that USSC Lt. Gen. Dayton has been working to draw up a security plan for the crossing that includes infrastructure improvements, training, equipment, and new procedures for the Palestinians to implement on the Palestinian side of the crossing. He added that the USSC is looking at the possibility of adding an international presence like that of the EUBAM at Rafah crossing point. Mofaz said that the main problem at Karni is security, and cited the tunnel discovered last week as an example of security issues in the area. He explained that the crossing was closed because the GOI knew there was a tunnel being dug, and that it was only exposed just last week. The Ambassador emphasized that it is important to keep the crossing open despite the terror threats because it is important for the Palestinian economy to survive; closing the crossing only makes Palestinians more dependent on support provided by terrorist organizations.

Karni Plan

¶4. (C) Yoram Shapira, deputy director general of border terminals and domestic airports at the Israel Airports Authority (IAA), proceeded to discuss a nine-point plan that the Israelis are preparing for the operations at Karni. Among the points are: a security zone; the security for pedestrians going through the crossing (Note: Pedestrians have not previously been accommodated at Karni. End note.); facilities; cargo checks; technology (scanners and cameras); movement of trucks; management operations; management systems; and the international presence at Karni. Shapira informed the Ambassador that this plan has not been vetted throughout the Israeli government, and he focused on a few of the major issues that the GOI would have to make decisions on at higher political levels. Among the important points to focus on would be for Israeli ministers to determine the government's policy on an international force on the Palestinian side, to include the force's mandate and functions.

¶5. (C) Shapira continued that the IAA is ready to invest \$1 million for a management system that gives Israel the maximum information possible on trucks' movement from the minute a truck calls for its time slot and is approaching the terminal, through to the very end of the process. Shapira claimed that until now no one has thought of a common management system for the Palestinians and Israelis, and said that this would be more efficient because arranging truck movements in advance between the two parties could ensure that a truck could drop off one load at Karni and pick up another, running full on both legs of the trip to and from Karni. Shapira said that it would be a computer-based software system, that the GOI is in the process of choosing a system now, and that "they can join us," referring to the Palestinians. The Ambassador asked whether a joint working group would be formed to develop the system, and Mofaz responded that the GOI still has to decide who would run the process within the GOI, i.e. the Ministry of Defense (MOD) or the MOT. He assured the Ambassador that the MOT will support the MOD in anything it needs or decides to do to "ease the life of the Palestinians" while maintaining security for

Israelis, because Karni was and continues to be a target. The Ambassador said that terror threats will never be entirely eliminated, but noted that infrastructure improvements and security measures could allow it to function in spite of threats. The threat level would be reduced by maintaining regularity in the crossing's operations.

More Scanners

16. (C) The Ambassador stressed U.S. interest in seeing greater use of USAID-funded scanners at Karni. Although he acknowledged that these container scanners are not being utilized very well, Shapira responded that the GOI is interested in obtaining an additional two palette scanners for the Palestinian side of Karni to help increase throughput to 400 trucks/day by mid-2007. He said that Palestinians exports to Israel arrive on small palettes, and that these cannot efficiently go through the large container scanners. Shapira reported that Israel is interested in two U.S. scanners for \$6 million total that are newer and faster, and are larger than the old palette-scanner currently at Karni -- 2.5 m x 2.5 m, compared to 80 cm x 80 cm. He said that these scanners could be placed in a locked room on the Palestinian side of the crossing, so that the products are scanned before they enter Israel. Shapira claimed that using five scanners (two USAID-funded, one old palette-scanner, and two new), would speed up the transfer of goods, saving a significant amount of money.

How Will the Palestinians Act?

17. (C) Mofaz said that one of the major questions involving the operations at Karni is how the Palestinians will operate on their side to expose tunnels and to prevent suicide bombers. Another question on Karni is how much budget the GOI will have to invest in screening and security procedures at the crossing over the coming years because this is an issue that must be dealt with for the long run. He claimed that if both of these issues are addressed with the highest possible standards, "you'll see us doing the best we can" to maintain the opening of Karni. He added that Karni is only one of a number of crossings in the Gaza Strip, including Erez, Sufa, and Kerem Shalom, and that there should be a comprehensive discussion of all of the crossings. He agreed Karni was the first priority, however.

18. (C) The Ambassador said that he understands that the GOI's budget may be tighter in the future, given the recent war in Lebanon, and Mofaz said that in the end, the budget for operations is secondary to that for security. Mofaz explained that when he was in the MOD, he had to make decisions each week based on threat intelligence he received. He said that it was a difficult choice to make because he wanted to keep the crossing open, but that he had intelligence that proved Palestinians were planning and digging tunnels. He continued that the recent tunnel discovered was 400 meters long, and 30 meters deep, and was started approximately eight months ago when he was still in the MOD. The Ambassador acknowledged that Israel faces a real threat, but emphasized that now that the tunnel has been found, Karni should be opened (In fact, Karni has been operating normally since September 3). Mofaz responded that the responsibility to decide when the crossing is open belongs to the MOD and Shin Bet, and that the MOT implements the MOD's decisions. He added that the MOT, and specifically the IAA, can make technical recommendations to the MOD, but that ultimately the MOD (which delegates it to the IDF's Southern Command) and Shin Bet decide when the crossing is open. Mofaz concluded that it would be important for Lt. Gen. Dayton's team to understand how the Israeli bureaucracy works, and that the team should focus its attention on the Palestinian side of the crossing. He said that he knows that the USSC has asked for a meeting with him, and that he will be happy to discuss with the general the easing of life of

Palestinians while maintaining security.

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JONES